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ABSTRACT

This document, in the form of a scripted conversation, represents the ongoing discussions of a group of teacher educators meeting regularly as a curriculum study group. One of several themes emerging from the conversations was that it is essential that the world-views of teachers be recognized, appreciated, and privileged. Serving as a core of much recent work in "action research," this position of professional respect is seen as enhancing work in curriculum theory and policy study. The point is also made that a collaborative understanding of teachers' "intuitive practical knowledge" between teachers and teacher educators will improve the work of both and enhance the likelihood of substantive educational change. Note is also taken of tensions and contradictions between what teachers sense intuitively and what is reflected in their practice. Specifically, teachers often confront scientistic views of teaching and learning (represented by testing and pressures for accountability), and frequently see researchers as being remote from the classroom, and conducting studies which are unrelated to teachers' lives in schools and classrooms. The point is made that teacher educators often share many of these feelings and need to work collaboratively with teachers to reconcile theory and practice. (JD)

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TEACHERS' VOICES IN CURRICULUM INQUIRY: A CONVERSATION AMONG TEACHER EDUCATORS

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Teachers' Voices in Curriculum Inquiry:
A Conversation Among Teacher Educators

Introduction

This scripted conversation[1] represents the ongoing discussions of a group of teacher educators at National College of Education (Evanston, Illinois) meeting regularly as a curriculum study group. Despite differences in our backgrounds, interests and responsibilities we quickly realized a shared concern for the working lives of teachers.

Several themes have emerged as significant in our conversations. First, we think it essential that the world-views of teachers be recognized, appreciated and privileged. Serving as a core of much recent work in "action research," this position of professional respect has enhanced work in curriculum theory (Barrow, 1984; Bussis, Chittendon & Amarel, 1976), instructional theory (Sanders and McCutcheon, 1986) and policy study (Firestone and Donner, 1981). The teachers with whom we work in our graduate programs are rich with experience and insight and hold envious stores of what Farrar (1983) calls "intuitive practical knowledge." Like others whose efforts run toward better understanding teachers' practical knowledge (see, for example, Elbaz, 1981 and 1983; Connelly and Clandinin, 1985; Clandinin and Connelly, 1986), we side with Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1986) in our belief that a collaborative understanding of such knowledge between teachers and teacher educators will both improve our work and enhance the likelihood of substantive educational change.

Secondly, we are taking note of tensions and contradictions between what teachers sense intuitively and what is reflected in their practice. Often related to dilemmas of schooling (Berlak and Berlak, 1981), our growing perceptions in this area coincide with an expanding literature on teachers' role conflicts (Gehrke, 1982), predicaments (Grant, et al., 1983) and dilemmas (Trumbull, 1987). While many

of these tensions are organizational in nature (Cox and Wood, 1980), others are more philosophical -- as evidenced in teachers' perceptions of research. Specifically, teachers often confront scientistic views of teaching and learning (represented by testing and pressures for accountability), and frequently see researchers as being "out there" conducting studies which are unrelated to their lives in schools and classrooms (Dombart, 1985).

Of course, educational researchers and teacher educators do much to promote such perceptions. Our third point, thus, is a recognition that as teacher educators we share in many of these conflicts and contradictions and need to work collaboratively with teachers to recognize and understand them[2]. Essential to our success, then, are a sense of community and a concern for praxis -- the "struggle on the middle ground" between theory and practice (Mohr and MacLean, 1987).

Collaboration

Dan:

> All of us talk a lot about the importance of collaboration, but I was almost shocked by something that came out of a recent journal activity. Some time back I asked a group of 12 veteran teachers to reflect upon and write about an early teaching experience. Not surprisingly, I suppose, many wrote what might be called "rude awakening" stories of one sort or another. What struck me most about their tales, however, was that two thirds of this group of veteran teachers uncovered memories related to collaboration.
>
> Several of their stories have some comparatively small mention of collegial relationships within a tale of larger adjustment. Some of these almost passing references were about important groups of others. "The staff . . . cooperated with one another and worked well together," wrote David; "I was so grateful [to those teachers] who had taken me

under their wings and had become my friends," Bev underscored; and " . . . the teachers and parents were like a family unit working together . . ." Delores recalled with fondness. Such remarks suggest positive, lasting memories of collegial teaching environments valued by these folks during their formative, induction years.

Most, however, recalled memories of a single individual: Karen's principal, who recognized and encouraged her talents; Tara's colleague who was wonderful and "shared everything"; Carol's friend -- "a real nut!" These memories suggest something beyond a neophyte's need to "know how"; for me, they are stories of enculturation. Early relationships like these serve important introductory functions for the culture of teaching; how new folks learn to think and act and value as classroom teachers. For some, these early relationships serve as personal growth models as well. Belinda writes:[3]

> I spent a good portion of [my first year] going home with such tension headaches that I'd lay on the floor and cry, they hurt so bad. But I persevered and muddled through somehow. The teacher across the hall took me under her wing and helped me slowly gain a sense of professional self-esteem. She taught me the ropes and freely showed me all her tricks of the trade. She became my life guard every time I started to drown. She is probably the sole reason I continued to teach. With her help, I educated myself in all the things I needed to know about teaching but for some reason or another was never taught as an undergrad. It took me years to build up my self-confidence to where I could believe I was doing a good job. . . . I've never stopped teaching myself and pursuing avenues I feel shaky in. . . . I think a part of that initial

insecurity will always be with me, but it's kept me striving to learn more -- and that's good.

Given the same prompt as the others (to write about an early teaching experience), Hanna chose to spend several pages remembering her friend, Sally. I have to wonder how the isolated nature of classroom teaching might be different had we all been as fortunate in our early years as these two women. As Hanna tells it:

> When I think of my very first year teaching, I think of Sally. She was another first year teacher who I shared an office . . . with. Neither one of us had a classroom of our own: Consequently, [the school administration] stuck a couple of desks in a little room with no windows and called it our "home base."
>
> Sally and I became good friends [by] helping each other through that incredibly enlightening first year of teaching. We learned all about class lists, assembly schedules, grading scales, lesson plans and the like. Everything was a new experience!
>
> We laughed together -- like the time that Sally ran a 1 1/2 hour 16mm film all onto the floor or like when the principal came in to observe my class present a song that we had learned and no one sang but me.
>
> We cried together. We both had grandparents die during that year. We cried out of frustration, too . . . When school ended, Sally moved back to Nebraska to plan her wedding. [My husband] and I made a crazy but memorable trip [there] for the wedding.
>
> Sally never taught . . . again. She has done some substitute teaching and is raising two daughters. We correspond at Christmas

> time, but I have only seen Sally once since she moved . . . She came back for a visit about 10 years ago.
>
> Sally's friendship was a real important part of my life during that 1971-72 school year. I was faced with many new things at that time and really needed a relationship like the one we shared . . . We helped each other build some order out of chaos.
>
> Thinking back to that time . . . brings up a lot of emotions. I feel happiness remembering the good times we shared. I feel hope realizing I was able to develop a deep friendship when I really needed one. I feel sadness remembering the loss I felt when Sally went home to Nebraska.

What does all of this suggest vis a vis "teachers' voices" in curriculum inquiry? For one, it says that when teachers recognize a new and complicated situation (e.g., during their first year), they seek and welcome the friendship and ideas of others. Second, it suggests that these folks benefited from their early, close working relationships. Obviously, such relationships were important enough to have remained with them as permanently postive memories.

Perhaps each of these teachers would be able to relate to the kinds of personal rewards and changes noted by Belinda and Hanna; I suspect that all of us who have had opportunities to work in tandem with a colleague were rewarded handsomely as a result. What this collection of voices suggests to me is the power that such personal/professional relationships hold for positively affecting the teaching culture. Such relationships welcome collaborative inquiry and mutual respect and serve as an important first step in uncovering what Lieberman and Miller (1984, p. 15) refer to as "the unrealized potential of colleagueship."

Ken:

I was blessed having good peers and mentors in my first years of teaching (1967-70) in southern California. My principal was a supportive, enlightened liberal who was the best school administrator I've known. I also think positively about the assistant principal, who backed me up when there were parent complaints about my teaching the play A Raisin in the Sun, and a veteran science teacher who held conservative political views but was articulate and well read, and helped me test out my growing convictions. And I think of a fellow English teacher (a great lover of books who became a close friend), a photography teacher (our next door neighbor) who was a highly creative and original thinker, and a few others I still keep in contact with. I also remember fondly the Faculty Follies (a show which we put on for students and parents), and occasions when a group of teachers would gather at someone's home to read plays in Reader's Theater fashion; these activities created a wonderful sense of community among us.

What I see in these teachers' writings (especially Hanna's) is the need for teachers to connect their work with their personal lives. When the two are separated, alienation occurs. Friends and mentors give each other the assurance that you don't have to give up being a person to be a teacher. And writing and talking about life histories make clearer the connections between the curiosity and intellectual play that attract people to teaching in the first place and the kinds of things that can make learning vital and worthwhile for their students. Good teachers, I think, are those who ask themselves "Is what I'm asking students to do something I'd be interested in doing myself?"

Sue:

It's disturbing to me, however, that so many of the teachers that Dan works with emphasized the significance of their early collegial relationships, and even more disturbing as we reflect on the powerful nature of these encounters as Dan and Ken have elaborated them. That peer and mentor relationships provide the potential for support, empathy, leadership and the prevention of personal and professional alienation is poignant, but I don't want to romanticize these examples.

Opportunities and expectations for these interactions have never been institutionalized or part of the culture of teaching; school structures continue to thwart such collaboration. Is it not sad and depressing that so many teachers single it out as an exceptional and memorable part of their early teaching experience? Shouldn't collaboration be the norm, so hegemonic that it is beyond consciousness and not noteworthy? If you asked these teachers if they and their colleagues regularly have sustained and intense opportunities for collaboration, how many would say yes? Wasn't the intrigue with the concept of the Boston Radical Teachers' group that it was so novel as well as empowering?

Teachers remain isolated, with few opportunities for peer or mentor collaboration and collectivity; we must be careful not to romanticize isolated instances of teachers winning some space and resisting rigid organizational structures, lest we contribute, through this individualistic celebration, to reifying the organizational impediments to it.

Anne:

Why is it that if teachers value collaboration so much that such collegial relationships remain informal, outside of the structural arrangements of schooling?

Ken:

I think it is important to recognize some of the cultural norms that operate within school settings. I'm reminded of my visit this past summer to Connemara in Flat Rock, North Carolina, the home of Carl Sandburg during the final 22 years of his life. While there we watched a videotape of Sandburg being interviewed by Edward R. Murrow on "Person to Person." At one point Murrow asked him, "What's the worst word in the English language?" Sandburg replied that the most despicable word he knew was "exclusive": "if you are exclusive, you shut out words from your mind and heart."

It's hard to disagree with Sandburg. It seems, though, that many aspects of the educational system are characterized by exclusivity, and thus conspire against possibilities of collaboration. To capitalize on those possibilities requires us, then, to "know the enemy"; that is, to understand the reasons for an exclusionary state of affairs.

First, with respect to teachers, there <u>are</u> feelings of isolation from one another. Many teachers learn quickly that the safest way to operate is to close the door and do your job; asking for help is a sign of weakness, and sharing ideas may mean that someone else will criticize or perhaps steal them. Some opportunities for dialogue exist certainly, in the form of teachers' lounge talk, department meetings, or curriculum committee discussions. But little time in such interchanges is devoted

to questions of professional growth, or to the kind of cooperative learning that occasions a greater sense of connectedness with one's colleagues.

Clearly related to these feelings of isolation is an emphasis on competition, not simply a facet of schools but a strand well woven into the fabric of American society. I recall George Spindler (teaching a course in Educational Anthropology) discussing the Hopi Indians of the Southwest, whose children had a great deal of difficulty succeeding in white schools. The problem, it became apparent through field work, was not a lack of ability among the children, but a lack of motivation to compete with other students. In Hopi and other Native American cultures, value is placed on tribal consensus; no one individual gets ahead unless others get ahead as well. Conversely, in American white middle-class culture, cooperation and sharing may easily be interpreted as cheating. So, in advocating collaborative inquiry, we are posing, to some extent at least, a countercultural view. We can see the effects of that cultural conflict when we ask students to work on group projects and have their efforts evaluated on a collective basis; the major concern quickly becomes that of whether the productive members will suffer because of the less productive members. The stress on competition is reflected as well in such things as testing, accountability, performance evaluations, and merit pay, all of which serve to divide rather than bring us together.

The results of isolation and competition are situations in which there are unequal power relationships. Two such unequal relationships -- between teachers and administrators, and between teachers and researchers -- are of special interest to me. Occasionally teachers view administrators as co-equals; more often than not they regard them

as adversaries or at best a hindrance to their professional freedom. Even those administrators who try to establish collegial associations with teachers may find themselves distrusted. The same holds true for college or university researchers who attempt to work collaboratively with teachers; if one party is perceived as having greater power or authority than the other, little in the way of true collaboration can come about (see Oakes, Hare and Sirotnik, 1986).

Anne:

The Graduate Field-Based Program (GFBP) at National College[4] provides a network of support for teachers which is in great contrast to the "lived world" of public school classrooms. It was in the joy of being able to share experiences that teachers' profound sense of isolation was expressed. It seemed as if the teachers I work with in this program knew little of what their own colleagues experienced, especially teachers at very different grade levels. Sandy wrote:

> Staying together throughout the [Masters' program] has advantages. Although I felt shy and unsure of myself when we just convened, I now feel I've grown both personally and professionally because of this group and the group's dynamics. My classmates have really become involved and, in turn, I have become a more involved participant . . . I can't believe how we've all rallied around each other . . . I was overwhelmed and down on myself, yet I was there to help others who needed it. I was willing to give up on myself but NOT on the others. And, in turn, everyone else wouldn't give up on me! [With the great diversity represented in this group] I would've never predicted this from the start!

Teachers who as children had grown up in poor ethnic communities seemed particularly sensitive to the social isolation of students who were being written off psychologically and academically. They seemed to know isolation, exclusion if you will, in its many forms and they could sense its early development in their students.

One woman, who seemed to summarize feelings of isolation particularly well, said that she was "trying to climb out of an abyss wearing a blindfold, [illegible] and gloves."

Being able to share with others has not only increased teachers' understanding of others' situations, but has led to confirmation of their own beliefs in many instances. As one teacher said one night after a class discussion on developmental writing, "Using turtles to teach writing IS O.K.!" Likewise, many teachers find theoretical support for ideas which they instinctively knew were good. One person who had taught for thirty-two years wrote about how she had always worked to teach students how to think, but she hadn't ever known the names of the inductive models which she has been using. She sensed what good teaching was, but she didn't have labels for her methods or know from whence they came! Another veteran of more than thirty years in the classroom pondered in her journal: "Perhaps we don't spend enough time being theorists?" She called for a deeper analysis of what teachers already do and know. A different teacher expressed a similar sentiment when she stated: "I know the how-tos, now I need to know the how-shoulds."

Contradictions

Sue:

There's an interesting tension that develops within many teachers in the GFBP as they encounter the contradictions between their conceptions about educational research and the Naturalistic paradigm as introduced in our program.

In response to the open-ended question, "What is educational research?", experienced teachers' responses overwhelmingly reflected the dominant world view, an Empirical-Analytical and Functionalist paradigm; a reality that is objective, external to themselves and directly knowable. Typical responses were: statistics, control groups, large samples, research proves or shows something, surveys, objectivity, experimenting, evaluation of teachers, pre-post testing, norms, fact finding, validating hypotheses, library research and science.

Most teachers, however, also intuitively recognize the lack of relevance of much of this type of research to their realities. Their responses to the same question above included these phrases reflecting this sense of distance: "ivory tower," "lots of jargon," "impractical," 'makes me feel stupid," "not always realistic," "done by professional scholars," "dusty shelf material," "hardly ever used," "needed for someone's degree," "not relevant to me," "somewhat boring and useless."

Our GFBP has attempted to involve teachers in reflective curriculum inquiry through introducing them to a naturalistic, interpretive and subjectivist paradigm. We encourage them to focus on curriculum problematics within their own experience and interest and believe that this is a necessary, though insufficient, component of an empowering and

liberating experience. It would be naive to believe that as teachers became immersed in a naturalistic research project, one centering more on their realities and controlled by them, they would somehow immediately or directly sense more efficacy or empowerment. We observe that teachers have mixed reactions to the experience of doing their own research. To the question "How do you feel about doing the research?", their responses indicated both the assurance and anxiety that can be associated with being personally involved and more in control of their research:

more relaxed, excited, gaining understanding of why research <u>is</u>, fear, fascination, frustration, worthwhile, useful for myself and my students, nervous, overwhelmed, apprehensive, want to do well, an awesome task, interested, worried, scared, challenged, capable because I'm in charge, and afraid of failing.

Introducing a naturalistic and subjective paradigm to these beginning teacher-researchers implies for most of them a paradigm shift; what Vosniadou and Brewer (1987) call "radical" knowledge restructuring. There is much apprehension and "being in charge" is not always interpreted as empowering. Judith, a teacher for 20 years, after participating in class sessions and reading a curriculum article by William Doll (1986), recognized the contradictions between what she was experiencing as part of this program and what she had always believed and wanted to continue to believe:

> My ideas and beliefs are constantly being challenged in this class. I realize that is one of the purposes for the type of study offered, but it works havoc on me emotionally and on my research proposal. . . .

It is because my basic beliefs are being so disputed that I must spend much time and energy wrestling with the new ideas. I am continually pinned down by the opposition of different ideas only to struggle to my feet to be pinned down again. Yes, I realize "opposition" is a strong and highly connotative word. When that opponent suddenly pushes the status quo floor of the wrestling ring from under me, it is very scary. I begin to panic, because my basic values are perceived as no longer able to hold me up. . . .

My most recent conflict occurred with the reading of "Prigogine: A New Sense of Order, a New Curriculum," an article in the Theory into Practice magazine. Its premise, built on Prigogine's scientific theories, deals with "the [thermo] dynamic relationship between order and change." Prigogine refutes Newton's ideas of a "simple, spiritual, and uniform" universe and replaces it with a "complex, self-organizing, non-predictable" one. His main concept can apply not only to science but also to social and educational systems. The main idea is that when disorder increases, chaos does not need to follow. "Sometimes there are spontaneous self-reorganizations to higher levels of development."

A "measured curriculum" is based on the Newtonian paradigm. Its basic feature is simplicity and according to the article the "foundation of the reductionist movement." I have taught Newton's laws and believed them scientifically. I have unknowingly applied them to my traditional view of teaching. I have most importantly accepted those laws spiritually. Again I quote from the article: "In a more subtle sense of spiritual, Newton took a God's-eye-view of the universe, seeing it as static,

> uniform, and externally controlled." External control is at the heart of traditional teaching. I do not believe though that God made people robots with remote controls. I guess I really do not believe in a God of imposition. My belief in human free-will and choice to follow God's principles is basic. To apply this to teaching would mean the student could accept or reject ideas presented. Most importantly since teachers, curriculum developers, scientists or students are not God, then does it make any difference who develops curriculum or how or what? . . .

Judith is experiencing fundamental ontological and epistemological contradictions between her world view and an alternative one. From my perspective, the traditional research paradigm perpetuates the isolation and alienation that we've been talking about. The Naturalistic paradigm, I feel, denies that dissociation. The basic contradiction or irony then, is that we introduce an approach to classroom inquiry on the assumption that it situates teachers as central and active figures in the research process. Some like Judith, however, do not at least initially experience this as empowering; they resist and want to retain what for them is the comfort and strength of more positivistic world views. So, at one and the same time they feel alienated from the fruits of much traditional research, yet cling to the fundamental epistemological and ontological distinctions that support it.

Dan:

As you know, I've thought a lot about Judith and how she's having to struggle so painfully through this existential disruption of hers. And I'm wondering about the relationships between her handling of these ideas intellectually while having to manage them practically. The paradigms appeared, after all, within the context of her planning to do some formal classroom inquiry: Is there some reason to believe that this connection between "think" and "act" served to enhance the power of Judith's internal inquisition? I mean, it's one thing to be overcome by "pure" ideas but a whole other thing to have to deal with ideas within one's daily practice. Maybe contradictions produced by such practical confrontions with ideas and beliefs are the real basis for transformation and empowerment?

Ken:

Judith reminds me of a teacher in a writing class I taught in middle Georgia, who came up to me one evening and said, with a smile, that she hated me. The reason, she explained, was that after our class she was so filled up with new thoughts that she couldn't sleep, and was generally a wreck in school the next day. She said that she could feel herself growing, and it was both exciting and painful. I think that was perhaps the greatest compliment I've ever been paid as a teacher.

Judith is indeed an impressive thinker and writer, as well as teacher. I especially like her response to Doll's article, and the way she personalizes the conflict between a Newtonian view of the universe and a new, less comfortable and reassuring paradigm.

I'd relate this to statements the teachers made about research -- they sense that there's something wrong with the positivistic view, but don't know any alternatives, so figure there must be something wrong with them if they don't buy into it. It's like religion -- there is comfort in the certainty of it, even if you don't fully agree. Judith's description of her curriculum project on integrating art and science (though not cited here), is a fine example of a teacher discovering and putting into practice not simply a method, but a new paradigm, one which values uncertainty but also the teacher's ability to set an intelligent course for herself.

Anne:

Many teachers with whom I work have responded similarly to research concerns. At first research was "out there," but as we spoke more of alternatives this changed. Mary wrote :

> The approach [I'm using] to research is practical. The inquiry methods and cooperative effort are a part of a research approach that I am finding gives me a security not felt in [my] other research endeavors in the past . . . This approach is non-threatening. . . It is not a 'sink or swim' situation. I feel the support system getting stronger all the time. We are building a foundation for action.

Ken:

Another teacher I know, who I think is building that kind of foundation, is a young woman named Linda, a student in my

Linguistics course last year. She first caught my attention with an entry from her reading journal, written in response to a chapter on language acquisition in the text for the course, Children's Language and Learning (Lindfors, 1980):

> I found this chapter to be the most exciting and beneficial to me as a teacher of any section in the book thus far.
>
> I am struggling with two opposing strategies in my teaching right now. One I acquired out of necessity and ignorance in my first two years of teaching. This is my "effectiv· teaching" strategy. I was trained through seminars and a rigid principal to run my classroom as if it were a production line operated by robots. I worked hard to plan, structure, increase efficiency, increase correct responses and above all Increase Time on Task! It didn't really matter so much what the task was, as long as the children were involved with it and were quiet (coloring dittos was a fine activity). My principal threatened not to give me tenure because my class was too disorderly. He sent me in to watch a very structured second grade class with an army sergeant teacher, hoping to show me an example of a classroom that really functioned. This was all difficult for me because I liked children to be actively involved, enjoying themselves, thinking and sharing. But I wanted to keep my job, so I changed my ways, and structured my classroom down to the detail. Not a minute of time off task was allowed. Not only did I want to keep my job, but I didn't know enough to see that I was teaching better to

> begin with. All the research that I was exposed to then said that this efficient classroom structure was how children learned best. I cracked the whip and got my tenure.

Clearly Linda's primary concern in this first job was with surviving; she did what she had to in an authoritarian situation. It's important to note, though, that in following her principal's orders, she was going against her better instincts. At the same time she thought that research tended to confirm the values of the efficiency and time-on-task approach that her principal was espousing. Faced with such overwhelming forces, it's not surprising that she would have diminished the importance of her own ideas and intuitions. Linda continued in her journal:

> Now I teach at a much more flexible school, though the underlying currents of teacher-directed instruction still prevail. My principal is pretty flexible. He realizes that there are many good ways to teach. He still looks for sound lesson design, but I'm not evaluated lower for having an active, noisy classroom. I am confident I'll be able to teach how I feel is best. He may give me some flack, but he won't stand in my way.
>
> The curriculum is BORING and we're expected to follow it. Right now, as a probationary teacher, I kind of have to. But if I'm still employed next year, I'll be tenured and look out!

The present situation is better, certainly, but perhaps mostly by comparison with the first -- Linda still feels the constraints of

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having to prove herself as a beginning teacher. As she says, though, next year look out! I like the spirit. She then began to write about her classroom, in a nicely reflective vain:

> As for now, I am somewhere in limbo between structure and freedom. My deepest intuition tells me that freedom is best. My training pushes for structure. I am working on disengaging myself from my training. I still feel most secure when my children are working quietly on an activity I have developed. This way I'm more sure that they are going to come out okay without any glaring ac[illegible]eficiency. I am uncomfortable when I see children "off task" or sitting and doing nothing (Heaven forbid! But Lindfors says that's okay!) However, I cringe when I hear myself saying "Johnny, are you working?" or "What should you be doing, Mary?"
>
> I get excited when I hear them discussing what I consider to be "constructive topics," but worried when they sit and socialize. It would be difficult to keep the former and rule out the latter. That freedom to discuss has to be there before we hear <u>any</u> of it. Plus, is it necessary to deter the socializing? My training says yes, my intuition says no. If I were certain that my children would come out ahead in my ideal, free classroom, things would be much simpler! It's risky and it's scary. Lindfors assures me that their language will come out ahead. But will they learn to read as well? Promise me they will and I'll jump right in.

> For now my children are partly free, partly structured, and I am very confused.

Feeling unsure about things, Linda is seeking greater certainty. I commented to Linda that there were no guarantees that students would "come out ahead," at least in terms of test scores. I also suggested to Linda that the question may not be one of freedom versus structure, but rather of the kinds of structure that allow for the best kinds of freedom.

Dan:

Linda's struggles, and those of many, many teachers I'll bet, conjure an image in me of an artist -- say, a painter -- who is employed in a place that makes black velvet silk-screened pictures (do you know the ones I mean?). She finds herself intuitively recognizing the absurdness of her position <u>within the system</u>, and perhaps the ridiculousness of the social culture which creates and perpetuates it. Yet she struggles to create personal meaning for herself, as an artist; she works to have some good impact on the pictures without exposing herself as a subversive.

Anne:

One forum which allows teachers to reflect while they are creating personal meaning is the journal. The function of the journal, however, has been called into question by at least two teachers in our group. Mary said it so well:

> The freedom to express personal values and meanings is available to us by means of the logs, thus leaving the oral, group participation sessions within a more sheltered arena . . . perhaps?

Mary seemed to feel more comfortable not having to share publically those values which might be in conflict with others'. It freed Mary. The other teacher suggested that the journals served to siphon off frustration so that deep-seated prejudices and clashes of values were less likely to occur and, therefore, we missed opportunities to get to know each other on a deeper, more intense level.

The reflections of teachers as revealed in their journals have also indicated a strong sense of impotence. Some feel frustrated that they have so little effect on the lives of their students. One teacher wrote: "Our alcohol unit ended on a tragic note." He shared the story of two teenagers who had died in an alcohol-related accident the weekend following the conclusion of a unit stressing the dangers of drinking and drugs. "Maybe I just shouldn't get so involved!" he wrote. His unspoken words seemed to be, "What good does it do?" It is a theme that is repeated time and time again. Many teachers feel powerless to affect change in any meaningful way.

Dan:

But they feel <u>politically</u> impotent, too! The other night in class we saw a moving example of this: Two good friends, both elementary teachers, spoke of major concerns regarding their district's new reading curriculum mandates. Denise, the

"activist," was railing about the top-downness of such directives, their problems and idiocies, and how she can't get her colleagues to stop complaining and start acting against the new rulings. Leah, her friend, is not planning to become active in this skirmish. Leah was, in the past, a persistent and committed activist in such curriculum battles. Recently, however, her side lost an important struggle and it was the last straw for Leah. If you can't win even when you're right, she recognized, then such confrontations are worthless. Now, rather than complain or fight, Leah closes her door and becomes a pedagogical subversive to such nonsensical directives.

Actually, most folks in the class recognized this as a familiar tactic; an antidote, perhaps, to becoming completely fatalistic. While it's neat that they can pull it off and continue to care about what they do, such actions serve to reinforce the isolation they know so well already. What I'm saying is that teachers' outwardly apparent political surrender serves to maintain their political impotence.

Ken:

The kind of going underground you described, Dan, was revealed by Linda in another journal entry. She responded to a chapter in which Lindfors discusses children's questions in classrooms, and the predominant emphasis in those questions on procedural matters rather than curiosity or social interactions:

> Sad but true. This thought prevailed as I read Chapter 10. Even I, who pride myself on my thought-provoking, exploratory, and problem-solving-oriented teaching style am

> guilty to some degree of stressing procedures. I spend a great deal of time each day, it seems, giving directions. Thankfully, however, I don't believe I have let skills and procedures overshadow the real ends I am hoping to achieve. Maybe, with this chapter to back me up, I can manage to slip even further away from a procedures emphasis. My sense about children and teaching has told me that was wrong all along. That's why I skip many workbook pages, quickly teach reading skills in order to get them out of the way so the children can use the time to do "real reading," let kids solve problems in groups, play with math manipulatives rather than fill in dittoed worksheets. During our unit on space, children wondered, asked questions, wrote down their thoughts in journals, looked at books and made projects. The other first grades copied two sentences off the board each day about a planet, one which stated its position in relation to the sun, and the other an additional fact about it. Now I'm glad I don't make my kids color dittos every day so they can learn to color in the lines. Now I don't feel so bad that my kids' handwriting might not be as beautiful as that of the kids in the class next door.

There is a growing confidence, and even feistiness, expressed in this entry. Linda acknowledges that she attends to procedures more than she would like, but then makes an assertive case for her teaching approach, and takes pride in being different from other teachers who have more pedestrian concerns. She's also using the newly discovered research to "back her up"; there's a

tone here of resistance, but not so much directly as clandestinely, by closing the classroom door and doing her thing.

One final entry of Linda's, in response to Lindfors' comments on learning to read, is of interest:

> I was thrilled to read Lindfors' comments about how "children, given rich and diverse opportunities to react with and through printed symbols, will use their own figuring out mechanisms to crack the written code." My intuition was that this was true and I have developed my reading program with this belief in mind, though never without some sense of uncertainty/guilt about placing less emphasis on the teaching of skills. Always the question in the back of my mind was "Will they miss something?" It's nice to have my heartfelt beliefs confirmed by research!

I am pleased to see Linda and other teachers coming to value research in this way; it seems to represent a healthy developmental process. At the same time I'm concerned about the tendency to place too much faith in research findings, assuming that these will provide unambiguous answers or "proof," or can be used as ammunition against evil forces. Lindfors' book, for example, is quite good, but does present a kind of party line about language development; adopting this view unquestioningly brings about the very conditions that we're trying to work against. The better alternative, I think, is for teachers and curriculum theorists to evaluate thoughtfully and critically the ways in which research studies (especially naturalistic studies)

pertain to and illuminate the realities of schools and classrooms.

Sue

I believe the primary problem here is a pedagogical one; teacher educators who work from a critical perspective also experience some contradictory tensions. How do we as teacher educators facilitate without imposing, privilege the teacher's voice without overly romanticizing the "teacher as worker," avoid the trend to dismiss <u>their</u> realities as examples of ideology or resistance, make no commitments as if in a wash of relativism, or act dogmatic in our "righteous" pursuit of their empowerment? I have not resolved for myself a satisfactory way to avoid some of these contradictions.

<u>Implications</u>

Ken:

One implication of our discussions so far, I think, is that for teachers and researchers to work successfully together, it is necessary for each group to recognize and understand the other's language, or what Shirley Brice Heath calls "ways with words." In Heath's study (1983) many black children were unsuccessful in school and perceived to be intellectually deficient because they did not meet the linguistic and behavioral demands set by their teachers. A close look at their home environments, however, revealed a rich and diverse array of oral language experiences,

different but no less meaningful than those in white middle-class homes. Helping children learn, Heath concludes, requires as awareness of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and an ability to capitalize on the strengths within those backgrounds.

The classroom and school constitute a particular kind of culture, whose values and expectations differ in certain key respects from those of the researcher's world, but also coincide in significant ways. In exploring both those differences and similarities, we can begin to develop a more common language and basis for greater solidarity.

Anne:

Exploring similarities and differences is one of the best means of conceptual development, and we need to revive conceptual analysis. Perhaps due to my own interest in history and comparative studies, and due to the types of activities in which we all participated, a great deal of discussion emerged on making alternatives from the past available to teachers today. To become more familiar with various philosophical approaches to curriculum is to reveal pathways previously ignored or unknown. Teachers talked about borrowing practices from traditions with which they were philosophically opposed, but they had never seen the connections in this way before. Often they spoke in amazement of how persistent certain current issues and practices have been. Many good ideas have been silenced over time. Why has that happened? Who has decided what's important to know and to teach? Whose voices have been heard?

Dan:

I work with a student who's trying to figure this very thing out, Anne. His name is Darrell and this year he's having to function with a completely redesigned program - right down to new textbooks that arrived only days before his classes began. Darrell is angry and unsure about how this happened and in one of his journals he responded to your questions about whose voices have been heard:

> I think we [teachers] should know more about what is really important for people to know.... Everyone has their own ideas about what is important and if [certain people are] forceful...and influential enough [they] can sway people to think in the same manner and therefore [their] ideas become [everyone's] ideas.
>
> Eventually, enough people are told about this that it becomes important... It may not be applicable in most areas but still it is enforced.

My sense is that Darrell has reached a point in his nine years or so of teaching where he may not take this newest professional indignity lying down. He is considering a research project that will take a serious look at "top-down" curricular models and a critical look at his present situation.

Anne:

It seems as if teachers like Darrell do go through some sort of developmental process. The journal entries have taught me that these processes are different for everyone, so I would question

any notion of sequential stages of development. But I do think that there is a process which occurs, and it is one which centers on some of the larger themes that have been mentioned. These themes could be restated as isolation/collaboration, impotence/action, blame/acceptance of responsibilfty, self-denigration/ self-respect, etc. These should not be viewed as poles on a linear continuum, but as contradictory forces always present and available through historical examples.

Dan:

I would add the importance of the element of time when considering your idea of developmental processes, Anne. Especially when collaborating, I think everyone involved must be able and willing to invest enough time to allow things to develop. I sense some important correlation between the amount of time spent collaborating and the benefits felt by collaborators. Adequate time not only allows important personal relationships to develop but increases the likelihood that such endeavors will be meaningful and understood by all participants. I've often felt that inadequate time can be teaching and learning's worst enemy.

Ken:

What I saw happening over a period of time with Linda was her involvement in a dialectic, between her training and her intuitions. Specifically, there is a conflict between her awareness of the time-on-task research and her discovery of research and theory that support a more open-ended,

child-centered approach. Her discussion is nicely contextualized in terms of her observations of and reactions to things that happen in her classroom. And what makes it most significant, I think, is her expression of contradictions and uncertainties -- uncomfortable for her (risky and scary in her terms) but necessary for growth. A tough question for me, then, is whether my response and advice (which I mentioned earlier) are helpful to her in resolving her present conflicts, or whether she will simply need to struggle further with these issues, as do we all.

A similar dilemma arises with respect to Jim, who at the time he took my Linguistics class was involved in a pre-student teaching internship. For an action research project, he chose to look at children's perceptions of how they learned. What he found was dismaying, though not surprising with respect to kids having been taught in traditional ways. As you'll see, he's quite critical of teacher-centered and narrow skills instruction, but is also reflective about where he fits into the picture as a prospective teacher. I am especially intrigued by the last statement, in which, based on his inquiry, he sets forth the dilemma and attempts to clarify its meaning for himself:

> As I write these words, I find myself quite confused by my contradictory impressions and attitudes. As I read Lindfors' book, I found myself agreeing enthusiastically with her, especially with her section on questioning and other use of language in learning. When I view Mrs. A's classroom from Lindfors' (and my) point of view, I am dismayed and discouraged. Yet when I observe the children I honestly believe that they are learning, that they are

> interested, that they are succeeding. I fear that I may not have the courage of my convictions regarding the true purpose and goals of education, or at least the best means of fulfilling that purpose and achieving those goals. I also can't help but recall my own education, which was very much like that which I observed in Mrs. A's classroom. I like to think that I was interested, that I did well, that my teachers succeeded with me and with my peers. If that is so, why then am I so critical now of the very same practices? I don't want to appear boastful, but I suspect that I was an atypical student (after all, I enjoyed sentence-diagramming) and that I now recognize that for the greater number of students these common and old-fashioned methods are alienating, not welcoming, stultifying, not catalytic. Although I am respectful of Mrs. A, I hope that what I have witnessed in her classroom is primarily a function of her personal teaching style and not of any extrinsic pressure upon her. If I am wise in that hope, then perhaps I may be confident that I will have the opportunity to improve upon her example. If I am unwise in that hope, if Mrs. A's classroom is primarily a creation of school and community pressures, then I foresee conflict ahead for me.

The final statement is especially poignant, I think. Jim hopes that Mrs. A's teaching is due to her personal style rather than to external pressures, that the opportunities for exercise of his own judgment will be stronger than the situational constraints. The optimist in me shares that hope; at the same time the cynic

notes that the teacher-centered, skills-based model he has observed is historically entrenched, and reflects the triumph of social efficiency over other curriculum views.

Which brings me to some self-conscious thoughts about my own responses to Jim's project: how to confirm the reality of what he has discovered and still be encouraging (especially important with beginning teachers). In the margins of his last paragraph I suggested the need to think about what kids are learning (various hidden as well as explicit agendas), about the teacher as mutant, about the tensions between individual desires and external constraints (trying to avoid a false dichotomy between free will and determinism). I wonder sometimes whether such comments have the intended effect. Do students see them as pat answers, mere abstractions, a Jewish mother's advice unrelated to real problems or real solutions? What's the <u>collaborative</u> thing to do? My hope is that these responses will help teachers/students like Jim clarify the relationships between thought and action for themselves, to become both active thinkers and thoughtful actors.

Anne:

It would be good for teachers if, as part of their training, they were exposed to the wide variety of alternative styles and programs that have been available to teachers within this century. The social efficiency/factory model of education has certainly prevailed, but many beginning teachers don't realize that it is only one model which is entrenched in a particular ideology. There are other models and traditions that can be used to explain school experience.

The fact that Jim liked school as a child but now criticizes the values of that system does not seem unusual to me. What is interesting in this example is the cause-and-effect relationship assumed between childhood input and adult output, ironically reflecting the same kind of efficiency model that Jim explicitly questions. Not surprisingly, then, he wonders how he exited on a different track.

Directions

Sue:

You've all described some pedogogical "spaces" here, let's pursue this. Patti Lather, drawing in part upon the work of C.A. Bowers, writes that "the pedagogical problematic here is to 'use such openings in a non-impositional way'" (Lather, 1987, pp. 2 & 3):

> . . . the danger is substituting our own reifications for those of the dominant culture. This leaves the student without the conceptual tools necessary for genuine participation in the culture . . . . Reproducing the conceptual map of the teacher in the mind of the student disempowers through reification and recipe approaches to knowledge . . . . Issues of imposition, hence, become of prime importance in understanding what happens in our classrooms in the name of empowering, liberatory education.

Anne:

As we speak of imposition and valuing, I can't help but wonder whose values are of worth here? Are we so relative that all values are of equal worth? I don't think so. Are we trying to move people to a new level of awareness and, if so, where are we going? Who privileges voices? Whose voices get privileged?

Ken:

Again, I think teachers and researchers need to better understand each other's languages. Like it or not, the cultures of the school and the university are different: these differences are reflected in language. An interesting question is, how different are they? Where do they diverge, where do they coincide? This issue is dramatically revealed in a project described by Susan Florio-Ruane and Joanne Dohanich (1984); while teachers worked collaboratively with researchers in processes of data collection, they did not see the researchers' interpretation, as reflected in the final report, as meaningful to them. As Shirley Brice Heath (1987) has pointed out, it is elitist for researchers to laud the virtues of exploration, discovery, and interpretation essential to a naturalistic paradigm, and then reserve those processes for themselves. The medium is the message.

Sue:

Another way in which I think teachers' voices can be marginalized is through our selective responses to their journal writings. When we comment in journals we are establishing and shaping, through a hidden or null curriculum, the terrain of the discourse

we will engage. We choose what to respond to, ignore, support or dispute and thus we work within and legitimize a Behavioristic paradigm.

Dan:

I agree, Sue, that we have a tendency to romanticize teachers' voices; for the time being, though, I prefer that to criticizing or bashing them. What's important to me is that teachers recognize the value of their own voices. And I also agree that we selectively reinforce "those voices that begin to speak a particular (radical humanist?) discourse," to use your words. In neither case, as yet, am I ready to apologize or mend my ways. I have to know, first, why I should.

But let me make a different point. Your last journal got me thinking about recycling. At one level, recycling is a relatively simple concept -- an alternative view for handling consumer waste. At another level, however, it can prompt a re-evaluation of the dominant U.S. view of waste. But in the "big picture," recycling represents a small facet of a particular world view about the environment, our presence in it, respect toward our inter-relationship with this planet, etc. Now, we can learn about recycling at any or all of these levels, and we can learn to recycle at some behavioral level or learn to view trash differently. But it takes an individual's own determination to arrive at some altered world view about the environment; to arrive at a point where recycling becomes a very small action representing or indicative of the way a person understands her world.

I think this is analogous to your thoughts on research. As long as research maintains its "thingness" -- as long as it is apart from teaching or life -- we will likely be "reproducing the conceptual map of the teacher in the mind of the student" as Patti Lather warned. The ideal, for me, will come when knowledge and awareness of non-dominant research paradigms become the bases for a student's eventual development of her own world view. Ultimately, all this stuff done under the rubric of research or within the confines of some research component or project is of greatest importance only when it becomes a part of one's everyday lived experience. Otherwise we're left with separating the glass from the metal -- with all the best intentions-- while stocking our refrigerator shelves with plastic containers and lining our wastebaskets with plastic trash bags.

Ken:

To return, then, to my earlier question: Given the contradictions which teachers (and we) perceive, and the risks of imposing our values on others, what's the collaborative thing to do?

Dan:

I think one start in a collaborative direction is reflected in Sue's recognition of how the processes we select to analyze and interpret teachers' voices are <u>themselves</u> problematic. " ... how do I philosophically and pedagogically resolve this?" you ask.

We don't. But our lives can epitomize the drive to recognize and understand such problematics. As Magdalene Lampert (1985) taught

me, we teachers manage our dilemmas -- we rarely resolve them. Life is sort of like a mine field: Once you recognize you're in it, you can sit down and refuse to cope, wait for someone else to show you the way out, or proceed with caution and purpose.

Sue:

In analyzing how Ken responds to Linda and Jim, it becomes obvious that one of the things he "reinforces" and encourages is "problem-finding." While interpreting Jim's journal, one thing Ken said was, "Though frustrating to him these problems were part of the problem-finding process, which he eventually turned to his advantage." I think the "collaborative thing to do" is, in part, to emphasize questioning and problem-finding rather than answering and resolving.

Anne:

I liked the way that Dan approached this project by sharing his journal selections and our study group analysis in an ongoing way with the teachers in his field-based group. Dan used the journal as an educational tool while it served a different purpose as a means of very private communication in my classes. Both approaches seem fruitful in the quest for trust among group members.

Ken:

In your work too, Anne, there are several significant themes. First, there is the sense of community, of collaborative exploration of issues, of the opportunity to share ideas and

feelings with a trusted audience. Secondly, there is the journal writing, which serves in part a therapeutic function, allowing teachers to vent their emotions (and even prejudices), so that, as you've said, they can get on to the business of sharing with colleagues and finding ways to help kids learn. And thirdly there is the power of a historical perspective, the sense of connectedness with those who have come before. It's been said that someone without a past is someone without a future. The feelings of isolation and impotence arise from being cut off from one's culture, from history, from other human beings.

What you're providing, then, is the power of community, of opportunities to disclose, and of a sense of history, to confirm one's own best instincts. I think that perhaps the most important thing we can give to teachers is not some new set of ideas for teaching, but rather an affirmation of their ability to develop those ideas for themselves, in concert with each other.

For teachers, administrators, and researchers to participate in collaborative inquiry requires that they see themselves as co-learners having equal status. To redress an historic imbalance, however, it is necessary to privilege points of view that have been traditionally discounted or disregarded. Doing so moves us closer, I think, to a more genuine spirit of collaboration.

ENDNOTES

1. An important aspect of our text here, we think, is the genre in which it is presented. This is a scripted conversation, which is intended to reflect the content and spirit of our group's discussions. As conversation, it is social, transactional, and deliberative in nature. As a script, it has dramatic immediacy, and reveals the interplay among individual perspectives and personalities. For purposes of written discourse, however, the script is selectively edited; while this may detract some from spontaneity, it allows us to focus on questions we consider to be most salient. Finally, we and the teachers we cite make extensive use in our conversations of autobiographical narrative. This enables us to look at past experience reflectively and regard our "stories" as personal illustrations of emerging ideas and theories, as well as of contradictions and dilemmas. We hope, then, that the medium represents the message, that the conversational form reflects the issues of collaborative curriculum inquiry which we address.

2. As members of a study group, we recognize contradictions within our own work and value the process of spirited debate. Constructing this paper is a case in point, raising, as it did, several ethical questions related to the ways in which we worked with teachers relative to our public discussion of them. We had all approached the use of the teachers' journals differently. Some groups of teachers routinely shared their journals while others never did. For one of us it seemed that a great deal of the most revealing and passionate data were obtained from

confidential accounts of teachers. This dilemma was presented to the study group as follows:

> My personal sense of ethics does not permit me to use or "privilege" voices without the consent of the writers. It is indeed antithetical to the concept of "privileging." If I request the consent of a few, and even if I promise anonymity, I place in jeopardy the whole notion of future confidentiality and thus risk to lose this valuable and necessary means of communication with teachers. . .
>
> The writings are from the heart which, of course, makes them very rich sources for analysis. At the same time the poignant and revealing entries in these journals were written because these teachers trusted me not to share their innermost concerns with others. I feel that even asking them if I can share some of their thoughts will make them cautious in the future to write more carefully as one would write for an unknown public. I do not want this to happen.

In the end all the teachers who participate in this dialog were contacted for permission.

3. Teachers' written texts cited in this paper have been edited for spelling only.

4. The Graduate Field Based Program at National College of Education is an innovative, two-year MEd degree program in which groups of veteran teachers meet weekly at a site near their workplace to engage in curriculum inquiry. Each group is facilitated by a core faculty member.

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